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Lord, Chester Sanders

Semi-centennial celebration of...Lotos Club

[New York?]

[1920]

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Semi-Centennial Celebration *of the* Lotos Club

Remarks by the

PRESIDENT

Mr. Chester S. Lord

at the Fiftieth Anniversary Dinner at the Club House

New York, March 13, 1920

THE Directory of The Lotos Club takes pleasure in sending to each member a copy of the remarks made by the President, Mr. Chester S. Lord, on the occasion of the Club's fiftieth anniversary, feeling that his words not only contain interesting and important references to club history but also that they reflect the spirit of the Lotos Club in a manner quite worthy of presentation in this way.

& June 1920 Jan

Remarks by the

PRESIDENT

Mr. Chester S. Lord

AFTER half a century of existence, the Lotos Club finds itself this evening pretty well established in life, in superb health, appetite good, hunger normal, thirst in splendid condition.

We are in the full enjoyment of a lusty manhood. We have our complete limit of membership. We are in as satisfactory financial condition as ever before. We are housed in a beautiful, convenient, luxurious home. We have the finest collection of paintings owned by any club in America. Our library contains the choicest magazines, periodicals and daily newspapers, as well as books. And our kitchen! Our kitchen makes other club kitchens look like a famine.

This has not come to us by chance. As some philosopher has said that there is no short cut to learning, so it may be said that there is no way of making a club quickly or suddenly mature. It is like good wine—the older it grows the better it is and the more we like it.

We have advanced from infancy to boyhood, to youth, to early manhood, to mature manhood, in orderly progressive fashion, because we have kept to the purpose for which this club was founded. That purpose has been first of all to foster and to encourage good companionship and then to promote the interests of literature, the drama, music and art.

From its earliest existence the Lotos has given expression to this purpose by publicly entertaining—and thus serving to introduce to the public—men who have become conspicuously great in these callings; and soon we came to include Presidents, ambassadors, statesmen, governors, generals, admirals—any inhabitant of this jolly old earth who had done something to give him glory or crown him with distinction.

In this way the club has made for itself the unique distinction of in a way representing the city—of being a sort of community or municipal host for the entertainment of distinguished persons—and thus it performs a public duty of

graciousness that has been widely commented on and appreciated. Meantime, we have vastly enjoyed the process. Our president, Mr. Whitelaw Reid, once said of us "There has been a good deal of eating and drinking here; and there have been dinners that would have given Falstaff himself indigestion."

The Lotos was started in a very small way by a dozen young men whose original notion was to make it a club of journalists, actors, and artists. Their first formal meeting was in an unfurnished room, and their only property, personal or real, has been described as consisting of two candles thrust into the necks of empty bottles. From that time, says this authority, the accumulation of property began. The candles, it is true, were consumed, but the empty bottles grew and multiplied.

Fifty years seems not a long time in retrospect, but they are as ages when we begin comparisons. These young men who began the career of the Lotos by candle light had little other choice of illumination. Gas and kerosene lamps alone dispelled darkness in those days—there were no electric lights. When they had finished their meeting they had to make their ways to their homes in horse-drawn vehicles. There were no elevated roads, or subways, no electric cars or automobiles. It took 45 minutes to go from the City Hall to 42nd Street in the street cars drawn by horses. There were no bridges or tunnels to Brooklyn; you had to go by ferry. These young gentlemen had no telephones. Their interiors were not searched with X-rays. They had no electric motors, or wireless communications, or electric apparatus for power or heating. There were no gasoline engines, or typesetting machines, or typewriters, or shoemaking machines, or seven furrow tractors that plow scores of acres in a day. It was harder to live in those days for the reason that all of these marvellous changes and inventions have tended to increase man's physical comfort, to save him time, to make life easier, to save him work. The vast push of modern invention is to make machinery do the work of the world. It is greatly to be doubted whether any other fifty years of the world's history have contributed so much to human comfort.

Indeed, all invention seems bent on getting more work done in some new and easier way. General Horace Porter told us here one evening of a man who crossed his honey bees with lightning bugs in order to make 'em work in the night.

At another time he told of a father who smeared the baby's face with luminous paint so he wouldn't have to light the gas when he gave it a drink.

General Porter was always making fun for us. In season and out he warmed our hearts and cheered our souls. He joined the club forty years ago and until quite recently was active in all our gatherings. He writes, in response to our invitation for tonight: "I have read and reread your invitation. The club has for these many years had my warmest affection. Its many acts of kindness to me I recall with grateful appreciation. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, but, unfortunately for me, I am not up to it. I wish this grand old club 50 years more of good fellowship."

General Porter constantly was simmering over with anecdote. One evening he told of trying in Berlin to use his Pennsylvania Dutch on a stationmaster in order to get information concerning a destination, and the man replied: "My Gott in Himmel, what a dam fine kind of German is that which you have speak."

Again he told of eating army food at Chickamauga with Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, when the chicken was so tough as to create suspicion that it was hatched from a boiled egg.

"Women are naturally opposed to a club," he said, "since the first woman's favorite son was killed with one. The first woman learned that it was Cain that raised a club; the modern woman discovered that it is a club that raises Cain."

Throughout forty-four years of its existence this club was presided over by two presidents, and its very great success is largely due to their influence. In the earliest days Mr. DeWitt Van Buren, editor of the New York Leader; Mr. A. Oakey Hall, then mayor of the city and also a newspaper editor; and Mr. John Brougham, the actor, served very short terms. Mr. Whitelaw Reid, who had just become the editor of the Tribune, was then the president for fourteen years, resigning when he became American Minister to France, and in 1889 Mr. Frank R. Lawrence was chosen to succeed him.

A year and a half ago the club suffered irreparable loss in the death of Mr. Lawrence. Had he lived five months longer he would have finished 30 years of service as president. Not any other member has had the interests of the Lotos

more sincerely at heart or more constantly in mind. Not any other ever did so much for the organization. Not only was he thoughtful, tactful and wise in the administration of his duties, but he insisted on making the club a vehicle for usefulness, insisted on its having real educational value, insisted that it should seek lofty ideals.

We cannot forget the charm of his personality, the pleasing grace with which he presided at our public gatherings, the smooth strength of his dignity which was without a suggestion of formality. We recall his nicety of literary expression, his sweetly rounded sentences, the remarkable uses to which he put his remarkable gift of ready speech. And we were proud of what he said as well as of how he said it. We have entertained here many learned men who have spoken to us from the wealth of their learning and the earnestness of their convictions; but, as I have said before, somehow, we always thought in our secret hearts, that Mr. Lawrence was quite as wise, quite as interesting, quite as eloquent as were the guests themselves.

We miss Mr. Lawrence constantly and sadly and we shall continue to miss him the more as the years continue to pass along.

With the exception of President Lawrence, our fellow member the Honorable Chauncey M. Depew has delivered more addresses at our public entertainments than any other man. He joined the club forty-six years ago and always most cheerfully and graciously has he assisted in entertaining our distinguished guests. His vast acquaintance with public men, here and abroad, his intimacy for half a century with our political life, our social life, our commercial and business life and our educational life, coupled with a rare gift of eloquence and oratory have served to make his addresses delightfully entertaining and instructive. We gathered here a year ago in complimentary recognition of his 85th birthday, greeting him as "an American of Supreme Achievement" and beseeching for him many added years of happiness; and he astonished and delighted us with the vigor and the spirit of his reply. Mr. Depew has added wonderfully to the brilliancy of our gatherings. Replying to our invitation for tonight he writes: "I love the Lotos and I want to participate in all that concerns it. I am sorry I must miss the semi-centennial, but reservations for Florida for Mrs. Depew and myself have long been taken and they are hard to get and I cannot return in time. I know it will be a record breaking event."

We are disappointed this evening because of the absence of our cheerful and efficient Secretary, Mr. Charles W. Price. He joined the Lotos twenty-eight years ago and he has been an officer of the club for nearly twenty years. He telegraphs: "With extreme regret I find it impossible to return in time to join in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Lotos Club. The cordial welcome at our Lotos events to men who stand for something is as highly prized as a crown of fine gold. The celebration today should be memorable and prophetic of the future. With temptations so completely legislated from us perhaps we may all live to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary. Permit me to ask you to extend to club members my sincere regards and appreciation of the honors and respect extended to me during my official life of nineteen years."

All through our history runs the name of dear old Mark Twain. He joined the organization before it was three years old, and he took constant part in everything it did. We gave him half a dozen complimentary dinners and he spoke repeatedly at others. On one occasion of a dinner to him, down in the old house, 300 diners gathered and—waited—waited for Mark—fifteen minutes after time—twenty minutes—thirty minutes—and the guest of the evening missing. The Secretary hopped into a cab and made a dash for Mark's domicile, burst into the place, and found the humorist propped up in bed, smoking a pipe, and pretending to be writing. "Good gracious, man," cried the Secretary, "don't you know 300 or 400 people are waiting for you up at the Lotos Club?" "Oh, indeed," was the reply, "is this the night for that dinner? Wife, bring me my clothes." The Secretary dragged him into the club just one hour and twenty minutes late. He said he had forgotten the date; but the knowing ones doubted for the morning newspapers said in big headlines: "Mark Twain forgets his own dinner." Mark was his own press agent.

One evening he appeared here in an evening claw-hammer suit of white cloth, and again he revealed himself in the red academic gown of Oxford University, which institution had given him an honorary degree. Always he had some surprise; always he was delightfully interesting; always his drollery and his jollity gave supreme amusement.

Commenting one evening on the Roosevelt administration, he said: "I've no desire to be a

Rough Rider. I know the horse in war and in peace and there is no place where a horse is comfortable. The horse has too many caprices. He is too much given to initiation. He invents too many ideas. No, I don't want anything to do with a horse."

He described, at another gathering, how the toastmaster introduced him to a meeting of miners in the western hamlet of Red Dog by saying: "I don't know anything about this man, anyway. I only know two things about him. One is he has never been in jail and the other is I don't know why."

The American people have keen enjoyment of humor. They love the man who warms them with cheerful talk. They loved Mark Twain.

So many beautiful things have been said of our club! Mr. Almon Goodwin, speaking at the dinner to Anton Seidl, said:

"Some one lately wrote a learned book to show that the Lotos was the sacred flower of the Egyptians. They attached a peculiar importance to it, so that everything in their art, in their religious ceremonials, in all the outward forms of their civilization seemed in some way to spring from the Lotos. This motif passed over to Greece, and the act of Athens was but the blossoming and unfolding of this wonderful flower under new skies—and this Lotos idea was not lost until the end of 'the glory that was Greece.'

"But, gentlemen, it was not lost; it only disappeared to burst forth in new splendor here in the Lotos. You welcomed the old idea and gave it a wider expansion. You hold that all the great things of the world are near akin, and that you cannot really develop man unless you develop art —and that if art is the embodiment of the Lotos motif the Lotos should stand for all that is beautiful and best in the new world. So you have allowed nothing great to be achieved in literature, or in art without the appreciation and the approval of the Lotos Club. * * * You have sought in every direction to establish the Lotos idea and make everyone feel that success in this world lacks something unless it has your approval —and, indeed, it does."

In 1900 we gave a dinner to that wise old Celestial, Wu Ting Fang, the Chinese minister to this country, and he said to us:

"I did not understand the reason why this honor was tendered to me; but when I heard the name of the club, I gladly accepted, because I thought there was a connecting link between it and myself. Of all the plants in China, the lotos is the one we appreciate, on account of its purity; we appreciate it because we not only eat it, but if you dip it into water it will straighten up again, the mud does not stick to it, and it is as fresh and as clean as ever. For this reason, gentlemen, we call the lotos a superior one among the plants; and in China the learned men, the good men, and the men of science we generally call 'Lotos' for that reason; and associations are formed under that name. So therefore, gentlemen, you understand the reason for my accepting this invitation, because I wish to be in your company by dining with the superior men of the United States."

And Mr. William Evarts once said to us: "I have come for the advantage of seeing, in its own home and in its own festivity, this club which has contributed more to the public fame and the public hospitality, to the city of New York, than all the other clubs in the city put together * * * This institution is framed by the same profound arts which built the pyramids and reared the obelisks. It is finally to subjugate government and church and society, all, to good fellowship and to have a good time—which never occurs to priests or kings or statesmen."

Likewise Mr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, while being entertained by us, was moved to say: "I expect nothing more like this reception as long as I live. It never will be repeated, never can be repeated. I go home with my heart full."

It is quite impossible to mention at this time all the celebrated men whom we have greeted in these fifty years. They have been exploited in newspaper articles but recently, and their speeches have been preserved so far as possible in our archives.

In the early days music was made a conspicuous feature of the gatherings. Offenbach, the composer, was entertained twice. He could not speak English, but he played music for the members that was understood. Herr Strauss played his Beautiful Blue Danube waltz for the Lotos boys, soon after he composed it, and the world has been playing it ever since. There were dinners to Hans Von Bulow, and Theodore Thomas; Pat Gilmore, who was a member; Gilbert and

Sullivan of comic opera fame; Rubinstein; Wieniawski; Maurel; Capoul; Saint-Saens; Edward and Jean DeReszke, and our own beloved Caruso. It is recorded that our fellow member, Mr. William T. Carleton, sang The Village Blacksmith to the club in 1882, the year he joined the Lotos.

But not any of this reminiscent music touches our jaded emotions quite so keenly as does the memory of midnight hosannas and jubilatees sung, with obvious accompaniments, by the entire company down in the crypt.

Always have we respected the law and always have we had an abundance of lawyers with us. We have entertained Judge Richard O'Gorman, Judge Charles H. Van Brunt, United States Supreme Court Justice Mahlon Pitney, as well as Mr. Joseph H. Choate, Mr. Elihu Root and many others. Two notable dinners were given to Judge Morgan J. O'Brien, one in 1888, on his accession to the Supreme Court bench, and the other in 1901, on his retirement. Among the speakers at these dinners were Judge Barrett, Judge Hilton, Judge Brady, Mr. Daniel Dougherty and Governor David B. Hill. And not so long ago, Mr. Lawrence presented here one of our number as having been a member since he was a mere boy. A year ago he was presented again as the recipient of high honors, as an ambassador, as an educator, and as conspicuous in political life and in social service. We welcome him here tonight as a recently appointed judge of our State Court of Appeals—and I am sure, Judge Elkus (turning to the Honorable Abram I. Elkus, who sat on the platform), we all congratulate you fraternally and most sincerely.

Mr. Frederick A. Schwab, in a letter of reminiscence, says: "The writer occupied the Vice Presidential chair during the three first years of the existence of the Lotos; the whirligig of time has brought another and I am sure worthier Schwab into that honored seat."

It is a curious circumstance that the first and the latest Vice President should bear the same name; but it is a shame indeed that Mr. Charles M. Schwab should be the Vice President of anything. He should be the President, not only of the Lotos, but of the United States of America as well. We greet him here tonight with sincere affection.

At the very beginning of Lotos activities, interested attention was given to art and artists;

and the spirit has not lagged in all these years. Exhibitions have been given every winter, two, three, even four of them, and constantly they have attracted the attention of the art world. We have the finest collection of pictures that graces the walls of any American club; and probably we have today on our membership rolls a larger number of really distinguished artists than any other club can produce. We number now 89 painters and sculptors in all. Our art efforts have been educational in high degree. Not only have the exhibitions well repaid the careful study they receive, but our club members contribute, each year, a very handsome sum of money, with which is purchased, to be permanently placed on our walls, a picture painted by an American artist. This contribution is called The Lotos Club Fund for the Encouragement of American Art. It was our late president, Mr. Lawrence, who started this recognition and brought the fund into successful being. I wish that time permitted an adequate recital right now of the very great influence this club has had with artists and the art world. When Uncle John Elderkin writes the second volume of his history of the Lotos Club, I am sure he will do the subject real justice, for he has been a conspicuous part of that service during all these years.

Always have actors and dramatists had conspicuous part in our doings. The club book for 1873 contains these notable names as members: Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett, William J. Florence, John T. Raymond, John Brougham, Edward A. Sothern, Bronson Howard, A. M. Palmer, and Augustin Daly; and soon afterward Lester Wallack, John McCullough, Nelson Wheatcroft and Joseph Jefferson became members. Complimentary dinners were given to many of these in the early days, and conspicuous among other guests were Charles Matthews, John L. Toole, Charles Wyndham, John Gilbert, Wilson Barrett, Forbes-Robertson, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal and Edward S. Willard. In 1887, at a dinner in honor of Lester Wallack, Judge Brady raised a long laugh by saying to the guest: "May you be six months in Heaven before the Devil knows you are dead."

Henry Irving was entertained three times, I think, and these functions were brilliant events in our history. The two dinners to Joseph Jefferson cannot be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to attend them. George Fawcett Rowe, who was an artist painter as well as an actor, was

a busy and an important member in the old days. Our present membership includes a very large number of actors and writers for the stage.

One of the very first of the long line of public men to be entertained by the Lotos was Charles Kingsley, and in his remarks he took exception to President Whitelaw Reid's wishing him a long life. "Let him ask for me anything but that," he said. "Let us live hard, work hard, go a good pace and get to our journey's end as soon as possible. I have lived long enough to feel like the old post horse—very thankful when the end comes."

There was a dinner to Mr. B. L. Farjeon, the English novelist, who was a son-in-law of Mr. Joseph Jefferson, and his remarks seem to attest that the Lotos kitchen was supreme in those days as well as now, for he devoted much time to praise of the sweet potatoes, the oysters and the canvas-back ducks.

About the year 1880 the Lotos began to entertain the incoming Governor of the State and the incoming Mayor of the City, as well as the Ambassadors of foreign countries to the United States. They have been, perhaps, as interesting as any of our dinners.

Many of you doubtless remember with especial pleasure the dinner given to Dean Hole of Rochester Cathedral. He was most interesting. President Lawrence introduced him as one who had clasped hands with Thackeray and was a friend of Charles Dickens. It was on this occasion that Bishop Greer, who came frequently to our gatherings in those days, humorously mentioned a clergyman who became very prosy and tedious while speaking on the subject of the Old Testament prophets. He got through with the major prophets and then came to the minor ones, and said: "Now, friends, where shall I put Hosea?" and a weary man in the back of the room joyously answered up, "Here, sir, give him my place."

The dinner to Sir Edwin Arnold, in 1891, was one of the most satisfactory of all. It drew a great throng and it was made very conspicuous by the newspapers. At its close, Sir Edwin recited his now famous poem of Potiphar's Wife, the manuscript of which he gave to the club as a souvenir. It was framed with his picture and it now hangs on our club walls.

A notable occasion was the dinner to Commander Gorringe, who brought over the Egyptian

Obelisk that now stands in Central Park. In his remarks he said: "Some, I am sure, have found fault with me for having brought this monument from Egypt at all. The way it happened was this: Some years ago the Khedive proposed to the merchants of Alexandria that if they would subscribe half the cost of removing it from its dangerous position in the city, he would pay the other half. He could not find a merchant in Alexandria who would subscribe a dollar to remove it. When an enterprising American asked for it, the Khedive replied: 'You may take it—for if you don't, it will fall into the sea; and I don't want to see it broken.' "

Mr. Edmond Yates was so overcome with pleasure at the Lotos reception to him in 1872 that he said in his response: "When the other day I saw John Brougham coming toward my hotel, I thanked Heaven that I had at least one friend in America. But John Brougham is displaced; instead of one friend I have suddenly found a hundred."

The dinner to General Ulysses S. Grant, in 1880, attracted very many more people than were able to enter the club house. Gen. Grant spoke for about five minutes—one of the longest speeches he ever made—and at the conclusion of the dinner, when asked whether he desired to add a word more, he replied: "I should think after the experience of this evening, you would not ask me again."

Mayor Strong was honored with a banquet and he seemed to appreciate the distinction very much—but the cheers for him were turned to good-natured jeers when he said that he had seen somewhere a picture of the Lotos eaters, represented by a sylvan garden with beautiful women and men, all asleep. He made haste to add that the picture did not represent the present Lotos Club.

President William H. Taft, speaking in this room one week after he had been defeated for re-election to the Presidency, raised a shout of laughter by saying: "The legend of the Lotos Eaters was that if they partook of the fruit of the lotos tree they forgot what had happened in their country, and were left in a state of philosophic calm, in which they had no desire to return to it."

And we may imagine there must have been good feeling the night the Lotos boys entertained Mr. James Anthony Froude, the English historian. The guest obviously was pleased—for he

said: "I myself was the editor of a London magazine—and I worked on the daily press, and therefore deem myself one of the members of the great profession which has so much to do in the progress of mankind. I am glad to say there is a sort of Freemasonry among journalists, and I recognize and feel myself among friends and brothers." He ended by asking all hands to visit him in London.

Other famous men who were entertained in the club's early days included: Henry M. Stanley, who told in a most interesting way of his search for Livingston in Africa; Professor Richard A. Proctor; His Majesty Kalakaua, King of the Hawaiian Islands; Moncure D. Conway; Martin Farquhar Tupper; James T. Fields; George Augustus Sala, the famous London correspondent; Auguste Bartholdi, the French sculptor; General A. W. Greely and Robert E. Peary, explorers; A. Conan Doyle; Anthony Hope Hawkins; and there were very many others.

Mr. Wilkie Collins, the English novelist, was a Lotos guest on the occasion, in 1873, of his only visit to America. President Whitelaw Reid in presenting him spoke of Mr. Collins's association with Thackeray and the friendship that existed between Mr. Collins and Dickens. The guest told of how, when a boy of 13, he met in Sorrento a lean, silent, melancholy American who treated him to a fine dinner that included cake and thereby implanted in his youthful being a sense of respect and of gratitude for American hospitality which time had not removed and which this occasion had made yet the stronger. The other speakers that evening included the notable names of Bret Harte, Richard Henry Stoddard, Dr. E. H. Chapin, Signor Salvini, the Italian actor; Edmund C. Stedman, John Gilbert, and Charles Bradlaugh, the English statesman.

The first Vice President of the Lotos was Mr. Frederick A. Schwab, who at that time was the music critic of the New York Times. He was one of the original organizers of the club and with him were Mr. Andrew C. Wheeler, who wrote critical articles for the New York World under the pen name of Nym Crinkle; Montgomery Schuyler, of the World; De Witt Van Buren, editor of the New York Leader; W. E. Alden, of the Times; T. E. Kennett, of the World; H. E. Elliott, of the Home Journal. Our own "Uncle" John Elderkin was with them before they had permanent quarters; indeed, he

helped to select the first apartments. Among other founders were Albert Weber, the piano maker; Harold Bateman, and Messrs. Appleton, Noyes and Hand, young business men.

It should be remembered that Mr. Frederick A. Schwab, the first Vice President, is not now a member, having resigned many years ago to live permanently abroad, consequently he is not eligible to pose as the oldest living member. That honor and distinction belong to a gentleman who is with us here tonight, who attended that first formal meeting, and who, consequently, has been a member for fifty years. In various capacities he has served more than forty of these fifty years as an officer of the club. Always gracious, cheerful, and able in his service, he has done more work, proposed more new members, given more valuable time and been more active than any other member. It gives me the greatest delight, gentlemen, to greet our oldest, and to many of us, our most beloved member—Uncle John Elderkin.

Also, we welcome the presence here this evening of a gentleman who has been a member for forty-eight years; who has been identified with our art activities during this time, and who has won for himself a most distinguished place among the artists of America—Mr. George H. Story.

We are honored likewise this evening with the presence of another gentleman who helped to develop the club down in Irving Place. In those days he was a journalist, connected with the New York Tribune; since then he has been a journalist in Brooklyn. Incidentally he is a Regent of the University of the State of New York. We regret that half a dozen clubs in Brooklyn have enticed him from the Lotos, but we welcome him all the same—Mr. Herbert L. Bridgman, editor of the Brooklyn Standard Union.

I hope, gentlemen, that you will pardon the informality of my remarks. I am trusting to those who follow to point the moral and draw the proper conclusions from these glorious fifty years of giddy good fellowship; a good fellowship that has served to screen a deeper purpose—a serious purpose to do a little good as well as have a little fun. We are proud of our past; may we not hope for a yet more brilliant future?

Congratulations and felicitations to each and every one of you. Let us push into the next fifty years alive and alert, with hopes and expectations of yet greater glories and even more substantial triumphs.

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